

Message Text

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ACTION EA-13

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-10 NSCE-00 CIAE-00 INR-10

NSAE-00 RSC-01 L-02 PM-03 DODE-00 OMB-01 PRS-01 H-01

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R 220701Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0508

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMCONGEN HONG KONG

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC

S E C R E T MANILA 0775

LIMDIS

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR, PFOR, RP, CH

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE REACTION TO CHINESE SEIZURE OF PARACELS

1. PHILIPPINE REACTION TO CHINESE SEIZURE OF THE
PARACELS HAS BEEN OSTENSIBLY RESTRAINED AND THE
GOVERNMENT HAS CAREFULLY REFRAINED FROM ANY PUBLIC
COMMENT THUS FAR. NEVERTHELESS, PRIVATELY, SENIOR
OFFICIALS DEMONSTRATE A NERVOUS CONCERN. THIS CONCERN
STEMS LESS FROM THE RATHER FLIMSY FILIPINO CLAIM TO THE
ISLANDS (WHICH THEY HAVE NEVER SERIOUSLY PRESSED) AND MORE

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FROM THEIR MEMORY OF THE FACT THAT THE CITY OF MANILA

WAS BOMBED IN DECEMBER OF 1941 BY JAPANESE PLANES LAUNCHED FROM A SMALL LANDING STRIP ON ONE OF THE ATOLLS. WHILE THIS FACT IS TECHNOLOGICALLY IRRELEVANT IN MODERN MILITARY CIRCUMSTANCES, FILIPINO OFFICIALS VIEW A POTENTIALLY HOSTILE CHINESE OCCUPATION OF THE ISLAND GROUP AS A MENACE OF UNKNOWN PROPORTIONS, ESPECIALLY IF IT PROVES LIKELY TO INVOLVE SOME OVERLAPPING CLAIMS TO MARITIME RESOURCES OR OCEAN BED EXPLOITATION.

2. BEYOND THIS, THE GOP SEES THE CHINESE AGGRESSION AS EVIDENCE OF A NEW LICENSE ATTRIBUTABLE IN PART TO THE DEPARTURE OF U.S. FORCES FROM SOUTH VIET-NAM AND THE CRIPPLING EFFECT OF U.S. CONGRESSIONAL LIMITATIONS ON A MITIGATING AMERICAN RESPONSE. THE SEIZURE HAS SERVED TO UNDERLINE THE POINT MADE JUST LAST WEEK IN MANILA BY SINGAPORE'S LEE KUAN YEW WHEN HE STRESSED THAT THE MALAYSIAN CALL FOR MAKING ASEAN A "ZONE OF PEACE AND NEUTRALITY" WOULD BE CONSIDERED UNREALISTIC MOONSHINE IN PEKING IF THERE WERE NO COUNTERVAILING GREAT POWER PRESENCE TO BALANCE THE TRADITIONAL SOUTHWARD THRUST OF CHINESE INTERESTS. LEE'S PLEAS WAS SPECIFICALLY DIRECTED TOWARDS THE RETENTION OF U.S. MILITARY BASES IN THE PHILIPPINES. WHILE MARCOS HAS NEVER PERSONALLY REQUIRED ANY CONVINCING ON THIS POINT, HE CAN BE EXPECTED IN GOVERNMENTAL COUNCILS TO CITE THE PARACELS INCIDENT AS A CONVINCING ARGUMENT AGAINST ANY WHO MAY FEEL OTHERWISE.

3. THE GENERAL FILIPINO VIEW OF THE PARACELS FIGHT ASSUMES THAT PEKING'S ACTION WAS ESSENTIALLY DIRECTED AGAINST SAIGON, AND THAT IT WILL BE ROUNDLY APPLAUDED IN HANOI. WHILE I HAVE NOT YET SEEN ANY OFFICIAL REACTION FROM HANOI, I SERIOUSLY DOUBT THAT THE CHINESE OCCUPATION OF THIS ISLAND GROUP HAS BEEN RECEIVED WITH ANY GREAT JOY BY THE LAO DONG POLITBURO. WHATEVER PROSPECTS THE HANOI LEADERSHIP MAY HAVE HAD FOR GAINING CONTROL OVER THE LAND AREA OR ITS POSSIBLE PETROLEUM RESOURCES IS NOW IRRETRIEVABLY LOST. INDEED, FOR HANOI, THIS MUST BE ONE MORE ITEM ON A GROWING LIST OF GRIEVANCES AGAINST PEKING.

4. IN CONSIDERING THIS FACT, I TRUST THE DEPARTMENT IS EXAMING THE SOURCES OF PEKING'S MOTIVATION AT SOME
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DEPATH. WHILE I ASSUME THESE MOTIVATIONS ARE COMPLEX, I ALSO ASSUME THAT THE THREAD OF PEKING'S PERSISTENT PARANOIA ABOUT MOSCOW MUST BE WOVEN DEEPLY INTO THEM. THEREFORE, I TRUST THE WASHINGTON ESTIMATES COMMUNITY WILL NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THIS CHINESE ACTION WAS, IN EFFECT, A DOUBLE PREEMPTIVE MOVE. THE FIRST PREEMPTION MAY HAVE BEEN AGAINST A NORTH VIETNAMESE OCCUPATION OF THE ISLANDS (USING NEWLY ACQUIRED SOVIET-

BUILT NAVAL CRAFT); AND THE SECOND PREEMPTION MAY HAVE BEEN AGAINST THE ULTIMATE SOVIET USE OF THE ISLAND CLUSTER AS A SUPPORT FACILITY FOR THE SOVIET FLEET, WHICH MOSCOW WOULD EXPECT TO ARRANGE WITH A GRATEFUL HANOI LEADERSHIP.

5. SINCE I AM NO LONGER (THANK GOD) READING ALL THE INTELLIGENCE TRAFFIC ON VIET-NAM, I DON'T KNOW WHETHER THIS THESIS CAN BE SUSTAINED BY THE FACTS. BUT, IF IT CHECKS OUT AS A GENUINE POSSIBILITY, THEN OUR PRIVATE REACTION TO THE CHINESE MOVE MAY HAVE TO BE SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT FROM OUR RITUAL PIOUS PUBLIC PROTESTATIONS AGAINST PEACE-BREAKERS. IT COULD MEAN, AT LEAST IN THE SHORT RUN, THAT A SIGNIFICANTLY USEFUL FACILITY FOR A MAJOR HOSTILE NAVY HAS BEEN TURNED INTO A RELATIVELY INSIGNIFICANT ISLAND OUTPOST FOR A MINOR HOSTILE NAVY.

6. I THINK IT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO ALL ADDRESSEES IF THE SPECULATION I HAVE ADVANCED COULD BE EXAMINED WITH SOME CARE AND AN AUTHORITATIVE ESTIMATE MADE. IF IT TURNOUT TO BE NOTHING BUT PREGNANT PHILIPPINE POLLYANA, REMEMBER, PLEASE, THAT IT IS WRITTEN ON THE EVE OF THE YEAR OF THE PAPER TIGER.
SULLIVAN

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